

## **Interview of Roy Stapp.**

Interviewer: Roy, we are pleased and honored to have you come up here today to KUED to be interviewed and so I'm just going to ask you some questions and take you through your service a little bit. You were born in what city?

Roy Stapp: Price, Utah.

Interviewer: Did you grow up and go to high school in price?

Roy Stapp: No, my father was a rail road agent calligrapher and he moved from Price down to Sigurd and then from there, they moved to Marysvale, which is the end of the line for the D&RGW Railroad. And I lived until I graduated from high school in the little town of Marysvale, and that's the last time I lived there. My folks moved from there while I was overseas.

Interviewer: So when, where were you when you first heard of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

Roy Stapp: I think I was -- it's hard for me to remember. I believe my friends and I were out in the backyard playing basketball. And, somebody in the house called out and said that there had been an attack on Pearl Harbor. And I didn't really know where Pearl Harbor was at the time. But, I believe -- it's a little bit vague to me, but I think that's what was happening. Because I was most of the time playing basketball. It was a pretty big cinch. It was close.

Interviewer: Yeah and how did you get in the service then?

Roy Stapp: I came up to the University of Utah for my first semester, first quarter. And my draft, I had filled out papers for my draft and they had not given me the number, and so in between quarters, the end of the first quarter, I decide that I'd walk downtown to this recruiting officer's office and see if I could get in the Naval Air Corps or the Army Air Corps. I'd always been interested in aircraft. I walked to the Naval Air recruiter and asked and he said, "We're filled up. We've got a waiting line." Then I went down the street to the Army, the big master sergeant, and I said, "I'm interested in flying, serge. What do I have to do?" And he said, "Well, you have to take the test that's already started an hour ago." And I was taking finals up at the university. And I said, "Well, can I take it now? And if I fail, can I take it again?" "Oh, sure. You can do that." I was a little nervous about getting through, but I had to get back up for a final exam up at the campus. And so I thumbed through this, and it had to be about a three hour test. And I thumbed through it as rapidly as I could which probably saved me and then I turned it in almost before anybody else because I had to get up the hill. So, the next day, which was a Saturday, I walked down and asked, "Did I fail?" And he said, "On the curve, you had to have 81. And you had 82. So you've passed." And I said, "Oh that sounds great." And he said, "Well, do you want to take a physical?" And I said -- I could hardly breathe between that. And I said, "Sure." "So, follow the red line." And I passed all of that. I wondered about me passing, and I kept waiting for the eye test, which should be high priority. It was the very last station in getting my physical done. So, I didn't understand why they did that, but I'd had very bad astigmatism and had been practicing exercise while I was going to school, and I passed that with no problem. And when I did that, he said, "Well, they're swearing everybody in just an hour." Well, I didn't talk to my folks. And he said, "You can call and talk to your folks and let me know." So my dad answered the phone and told him what I'd done, and he was a World War

I veteran. And I told him what I said, and he said, "Oh, that's great." He called me Hank, named me after Hank Greenberg. I wasn't a good baseball player, but maybe I looked like him. Nevertheless, he was delighted and I said, "How are you going to give it to my mother?" She's very nervous, high strung. And he said, "I'll handle it. Hang on." And I heard her scream in the background. She didn't faint, but she finally came to the phone and I said, you know, "I'll be fine." But they told us that we could finish another semester, another quarter then. So, I went home and just about two weeks later, they said, "You better go up to Salt Lake and get ready. You're going to be shipped out." So, it was that quick.

I enlisted on December the 15th, 1942. And was ready to take the next quarter and had already signed up. So they shipped us all off to Lincoln, Nebraska for basic training in little tar paper shacks. And not a very good way to get introduced to the military, and basic, which is difficult. But we made it through that and from there, we went to Santa Ana where we were given all the psychological tests and physical tests that went on for five weeks, I guess. We passed those all right, and then they sent us from there to what they called, "College Training Detachment," CTD, all over the country. They would send cadets who had been classified out of Santa Ana there until the spots opened up. And we were finally sent to Thunderbird Field in Phoenix for primary. And then to Lemoore, California for basic and advanced training in AT 16s in La Junta, Colorado, graduating April the 15th, 1944. We got either flight officer or second lieutenant, this was a new rank that had come up while we were there and we sort of sweated out, not wanting the flight officer, but the second lieutenant. All of my buddies and I were able to get that.

And from there, they told us we could go home and then we would be sent to a field where we would be trained together to fly twin engine aircraft. And so, I went home and four days later, they had given orders to ship us overseas to Naples, Italy. Of course, we didn't know that. It had to be an administrative screw up because they sent us overseas and much to our chagrin, they had B-25s there they were going to start training cadets in and only room for half the class. So, the first half of the alphabet went in the B-25s, and we went in the same twin engine aircraft that we had in basic, which was a morale buster. But, you know, we followed orders. But, we took maybe -- I think maybe there was 10 days we had between graduation and departure from Greensborough, and that was in June or May, I can't remember. But we didn't have much time home at all and took us about 12, 14 days to get across and landed in Naples.

Interviewer: Where there, did you have any unusual experiences during your basic and all of that pre-schooling and stuff that you might want to share?

Roy Stapp: Well, I enjoyed the military and definitely loved to fly. I had, at Thunderbird Air Field, in Stearman, which was the best airplane I ever flew, because I had the scarf and the goggles.

Crew Member: Can I just stop for a second? I'm sure. Bill?

Crew Member: Yes?

Crew Member: Did that audio change? Because he's sitting right over the mic now, he's not leaning back. So did that matter?

Crew Member: I didn't notice that.

Crew Member: I'm sorry, because he's going to lean forward over the mic.

Elizabeth: If he hasn't noticed it --

Crew Member: It doesn't matter.

Roy Stapp: You're able to hear me?

Interviewer: Don't worry about it, yeah. Often times, there's funny or unusual experiences that happen in basic training or prior to you getting over to location, I wondered if you had a couple of those.

Roy Stapp: Yeah, I have several that I could tell.

Interviewer: Well, hit us with one.

Roy Stapp: Okay, when I got to Thunderbird Field, I had a civilian instructor. His name was Gus Forney. He was from Salt Lake City. His mother was a concert pianist and he himself was a great organ player, in fact, they used to play the organ down at 21st South down at the Organ Loft, they called it. But, Gus was a super guy. He had flown the ol' Tri-Motor Fords and he really knew how to fly. But, I was one of his cadets, thank goodness. We had a lot of experiences to go solo, and so, one day, he asked me if I wanted to fly a Navy Stearman that had 50 horse power more than the other Army Air Corps. And I said, "Sure, I'd be happy to." So, they had a field that was a mile square, asphalt. No radios, you just had to figure you knew what you were doing. So I got into position to take off and jammed the throttles forward and a Stearman can take off in a very short roll, but when I got over the fence, maybe a thousand feet or even less, the engine quit. Just stopped. And there was no other way, so I kicked the rudder and turned back in and landed with the wind and got on to the field and I, as I landed, I sort of bounced and, well they call it a ground loop when the lower wing hits the ground, it's a ground loop and if you had too many of those, you didn't stay as a cadet. But, I sat there for a long time and the people in ops; they had to have noticed or should have noticed that

there was an airplane that was out there not in the proper place, so they jumped in the car and came out and Gus was with them and said, "What happened?" And so I told him, I said, "I pumped the throttle, I looked and made sure that the valve was right, and I just came in and landed." And he said, "Man, that's great." So, he came to me that night and said that the carburetor was filled with sand. They'd flown them up from Texas. "You'd ought to get an air medal for that." And I said, "Well, I just did it." But then to go further on the first landings, my buddy that I was with, CK Stoel was his name, we were all alphabetically friendly, you know? So, CK was having problems with air sickness and we, as his buddies, were trying to help him and so, we had to sneak out to the line with these buckets and clean up after it. It really wasn't very much fun, but we really didn't want him to wash out. The next day, I was talking to one of my friends and he said, "You know, I think we -- I heard about a fellow that had air sickness and he did this thing and it cured him." And I said, "Tell me about it." "What you do is go up and turn up side down and hang upside down on your belt and just keep maybe a minute, a minute and a half, two minutes, and kick back over. It cured me." I don't know whether it was him or one of his friends. So, I was right close to CK as we were going out to do solo flight and practice spins and Immelmans and those sorts of things. I said, "CK, follow me out close to the emergency field out in the desert." And he said, "What do you want me to do?" So I told him the story and he said, "Man, I'll try anything." So we flew out there and we were out maybe three or four thousand feet and I went out and the fuel pump on a Stearman is -- the tank is above the wings, just above your head -- and the gas gauge was a piece of wire, baling wire, on a cork. And when I had picked up the aircraft from the cadet that was flying it, we just let it keep running and I said, "Is this fuel okay?" And I looked up, and sure enough, this hunk of baling wire was sticking up. So I got in and we buzzed off. So, CK and I got up side down so we could

talk to one another, yell a little bit, with no engine noise. And I said, "Are you doing okay, CK?" And I bet we were three, four minutes upside down. And he said, "I got to go in because I've got another appointment." So he went back up right and off he went. And I was having so much fun hanging by the belt, I kept waiting and waiting and then I thought I better have a little altitude and I kicked over, and I heard the cork bounce in the bottom of the gas tank. And I didn't have a drop of fuel. It happened to be fairly close to this emergency field, which was maybe four or five hundred yards square. So I was a bit nervous and I did all the procedures downwind base and I came in and almost over shot, but I got on and put the brakes and stopped and the propeller nose hit a barb wire and put a little scratch in it. So, I was fortunate. Of course, there was nobody anywhere for miles around. Not even a jackrabbit to talk to. So, no radio. So I pulled the chute out and put it under the wing and this was in the morning and it wasn't really hot then. And I went sound asleep under the wing. And of course, back at the base, they wondered where I was, so they sent a first lieutenant out in a BT-13, which is the noisiest airplane. We flew it in our last class. It was a noisy, noisy -- and he came and buzzed the field and I slept through the whole thing. I was really high-strung. And he landed and he came running over and he says, "Are you okay?" And I said, "Yeah, there was no gas in the tank and I was told that there was and I should have taken a look but I didn't." Nonetheless, he said, "Well, come on and get in." And I said, "Did you bring any gas?" And he said, "No, you can't fly that thing back." And I said, "Why? I landed it and took it off." He said, "The colonel won't allow that." And I got in and flew back. And I had to meet a board on that particular thing and ol' Gus Forney was there and he said, "Why are you even having a board? He's a guy that had two forced landings. Are you trying to get rid of him?" But, he was a great guy. I liked Gus, and later on when I went to Salt Lake airplane number two, I went and checked out in small aircraft and it was Gus and I said,

"Do you remember me, Gus?" And he said, "I've trained hundreds of cadets, never had one forced landing, and you had two. Do you think I remember you?" So, Gus remembered me. We have a lot of other things like, little practical jokes and things like that.

Interviewer: Those are interesting stories. All right, let's get over to your first base then. You went straight to Italy, is that right to start with?

Roy Stapp: Yeah, we landed in Naples and the powers to be weren't sure where we were going. You know, they screwed up sending us over in the first place. We landed in Naples and we went to a college -- Mussolini had built a brand new college just outside Naples and we bivouacked there for awhile. And then, they came to us and told us that we could maybe go to several of the air fields around Naples and see if the operations officer could use us to fly an airplane that we'd not been in. And we were so eager to fly, so a bunch of us did that, but of course we'd get laughed at every time because the three of us that went together when we finally got assigned, they labeled us "The Three Cadets." So, from there, we went to Sicily, which had not been taken very long ago. Red flagged with land mines and they had a C-47 troop carrier outfit there that was detached to another base, so there was one airplane there for all of us to train in. And I didn't even get in the airplane because it was so difficult. One night, my friend Stromnous was their junior OD and he came in and quietly woke all of us who weren't married. He told us what happened. The Twicks came in and asked for any pilots, any qualified pilots to come over to Sardinia for B-26 and Stromnous, who was the junior, he wrote -- we have available so many pilots. And so the next morning, a C-47 sat there and we got on and left Sicily and flew to Sardinia with the base just outside Villacidro. And, when we got there, there were these big, huge airplanes. Probably one of the most horrifying things that I ever saw was crawling up in the cockpit and looking at the control panel. All of those, you know -- we are

used to four or five little dials, so it was a little frightening. But, the next morning, the three of us, there may have been more, but we went to the ol' man and saluted. We were still cadets and you had to dress right, not like Mash. And it's difficult for me to remember exactly what happened, but as I recall, we just went in and reported and he looked at me and said, "Lieutenant, how many hours do you have in a B-26, and where's your crew?" I said, "Sir, what is a B-26 and we are the crew." And he threw papers in the air and said, "You're nothing but blankedy-blank cadets." And that's right, we were. Anyway, we got there and he said, "Here, read the handbook on the B-26 and make sure you memorize it." That was in late June when we got -- and I flew to North Africa on a beer run or something like that. I'm not sure -- anyway, got a little bit of time on the right seat. And on July the 7th, 1944, I flew my first mission. And so did my other two buddies.

So, a lot of funny things happened. We had six people in a tent and we put two tents together, and the old man would send new pallets over to us because we had two tents and so we named it the "Transient Hotel." In fact, I have a picture of it. And so every new guy that would come would come to the Transient Hotel. So, the five of us, or six of us went through and stayed there till the war ended. But, you asked for --

Interviewer: Well, take us through your missions over Italy and tell us about what type of missions were they, what a typical day was like, and tell us in as much detail your most harrowing or dangerous experience.

Roy Stapp: Okay.

Interviewer: On those first 25 missions that you flew in Italy.

Roy Stapp: I have a picture on a little pamphlet that we have that's called "The Sortie," S-o-r-t-i-e. And it comes out each quarter, and they had a picture of two aircraft breaking away from a target that had been hit with bombs and the smoke and the debris was up 10,000 feet. That happened to be my first mission and that picture that they have on the front of that Sortie has got a number 89, "Old Iron Sides." And I flew a good part of my missions in Old Iron Sides. But you could see the number, it's amazing that that happened and that was my first mission on July the 7th. When we prepared to go on a mission, we looked at the bulletin board and found out which aircraft we were assigned to, and of course, three didn't have any kind of a crew. So they just used us inadvertently whenever and where ever, which made it more a modern miracle for us to have been able to get through all that without any problems with purple hearts or anything like that. We did get quite a few air medals, but we'd go to the line and they'd brief us and then we'd crawl in the aircraft and we had to know what the signals were and what the secret names were. And I have some of those; they were classified then, of course, but not now. But then you'd fly in six aircraft to an element, and usually three elements from the four squadrons. So you'd have 12 aircraft. We had 50, or 25 aircraft per squadron. And we flew three high and three under, the number four man would fly underneath number one and then aircraft on each side and fly pretty close formation. In fact, our commander insisted that we fly formation training while we were on home missions because when we flew six B-26s in tight, tight formation, German fighters very seldom tried to bother us. We'd fly at 10,000 feet; the flack was, of course, our big enemy. But with eight 50 calibers per aircraft times six, that's 48 -- 50 caliber. And they'd have to point it to the sky and let the fighter fly into it. So, German air fighters very seldom -- maybe I saw four or five enemy aircraft. Flack, I saw more than I ever wanted to. But, we did have -- the B-26s had the best report for the fewest losses in combat and

also for target accuracy. We'd bomb bridges and marshalling and ammunition dumps and key points, hoping that we would cut the lines to the enemy by doing that, and so, nearly all of our missions was that -- not hardly ever ground support, but tactical targets. Railroad, bridges, and highway bridges. Most of them, I put the pictures in to bring, but I didn't bring them. It was -- it was well organized and we weren't very well trained.

Interviewer: After these three cadets --

Crew Member: Wait right here for a second, I have to change these three batteries.

(Break in recording).

Roy Stapp: Usually five.

Interviewer: And you were there with your cadet buddies, one was flying pilot, the other co-pilot, and then they'd just add -- the crew guys were always different then, for you.

Roy Stapp: What we did is, most everyone there came over with a crew and brought their own aircraft. And sometimes if they'd have a hangover or something had happened, they'd pump us into the right seat. And of course, we had to go and beg to be checked out as first pilots. But then, they didn't know where to put us or who to put with us as first pilots. But we just traded off seats. For us, for we three to fly together, that happened only, well, I flew two missions with my buddy Stromnous and one with Russen. The rest, it was sort of like mixing up vegetables or just -- I don't know. It was very difficult because we never got to the point where we knew any of the crew.

Interviewer: Well, that's interesting. Are we rolling?

Crew Member: (Inaudible).

Interviewer: Okay. Were you part of the D Day? Did you participate in that D Day invasion?

Roy Stapp: Yes, we were part of that. Most of that, actually, we were fogged in on D Day, but prior to D Day and after D Day, we had missions there. But none of our wing or group was able to take off from Dijon that day. So, we had targets on the mop-up and, but, no, we weren't involved. We were briefed on it and went to the flight line each day, but each day the weather kept us down.

Interviewer: Okay, and tell us about that, I guess you were over in Germany, then, or in -- you based in France about that?

Roy Stapp: Yeah, Dijon.

Interviewer: The mission to Colmar.

Roy Stapp: Oh, yeah, the Colmar pocket was a large battle ground and it was, actually, what it was is, Breisach is the German town, Colmar was the French town on a bridge over the Rhine River. And it was the further most east part of France, so when the Allied forces drove the Germans out, then they were all herded up into that area. And, we were given the target to bomb out that bridge, and of course, when the Germans moved out, they brought their 88 millimeter anti aircraft guns with them to take them home. And they still had ammunition, so it was a very frightening situation to hear the intelligence officer tell us that there could be upwards of 100 anti aircraft guns in that area, but there was a high priority mission to knock the bridge out. And that was my most difficult -- that was my 27th. I brought copies of the targets that are there. It's probably the 27th or 28th mission. And we were in one of the first

elements to go in and, they indeed had a lot of guns. I don't know how many there were, but the smell of the powder and if you could see the burst of the missile, the red part of it, you know you were in trouble because it was awfully, awfully close. And the smoke, by the time our second element got there, they couldn't see the target. They finally, the bombardier caught just a glimpse of it. But we did knock a span out of the bridge. And I think we had three different missions up there, and they were all pretty tough in the -- I don't know which aircraft I was flying. It could have been Old Iron Sides, but I got a plastic bottle of that up above my bed and have it labeled Old Iron Sides. I don't know who I flew with, but I do know that the right engine, starboard engine got hit and a piece of flack just lifted the top of the cylinder off, and you could see the cylinder come up out of the -- into the air and pump oil. So we throttled way back on that, and just barely enough to pull its own weight and we got back okay. When we touched down, the engines quit, both of them. And the crew chief came in the next day and stopped me and he said, "You want to know how many holes you had in your plane?" And I said, "Yeah, let me know." He said, "You had over 100 holes in that aircraft." And those people on the line were magicians in addition to not getting enough credit for what they did. They'd fix things, change engines in terrible weather, and we'd push the throttles and the airplanes would go, but, yeah. We had over 100 holes, and that was -- I really wouldn't have wanted to go back.

Interviewer: On that mission, you flew at an elevation of, what was your elevation?

Roy Stapp: 10,000, between 10,000 and 11,000. Often, sometimes the -- sometimes we'd do what they called "glide bombing." When we'd come to turn in on a mission, which they called "Initial Point," IP, and you'd turn and go, then you had to hold steady and let the bombardier take control. So, here you were flying with these six airplanes that presented

huge targets for the anti aircraft. And sometimes during the first part of the IP run, the final run, we would drop 500 feet or so and see if we could throw the Germans out, but they usually could pick that up. They were experts.

Interviewer: Why was that bridge so important to the Germans?

Roy Stapp: Well, because they had a huge number of Germans there and the Allied Forces were pushing them, trying to take them prisoners. And they were starting to take them prisoners, and they were pushing people across the bridges as fast as they could. I mean, it was solid cars and people going across to get back to the homeland. And the Colmar pocket, I've not had that, but I do know they have a write-up about it, and I've not read much about it, but that seems to be the logical reason that that was a high priority mission.

Crew Member: What was that bridge called?

Interviewer: It's the Colmar pocket.

Crew Member: Is that what the bridge is called though?

Roy Stapp: Breisach was the mission name, and it was at Breisach, Germany. And it went from Breisach, Germany to Colmar, France. But the mission was called the Breisach Mission.

Crew Member: But the bridge over the Rhine was --

Roy Stapp: Yeah, the bridge over the Rhine.

Crew Member: It was just called bridge over the Rhine? That was the name of the bridge?

Roy Stapp: No, the name of the bridge was just bridge. The Germans called it Breisach Bridge; the French called it the Colmar Bridge.

Crew Member: I see, okay.

Interviewer: Yeah, and it prevented the mass retreat and allowed the Americans to capture --

Roy Stapp: Right.

Interviewer: -- tens of thousands of equipment and prisoners because they knocked out that bridge.

Roy Stapp: Yeah, it was a major, major battle.

Interviewer: Are there any other missions that stick out in your mind as being memorable?

Roy Stapp: We tried to remember what they called the milk run, when we got no fighter opposition or flack. They were nice, but they didn't last long. I suppose, out of 50 missions, I had maybe 15 without opposition. Oh, I do remember another funny part about my training. It was funny to me, but not to the pilot I was with. This was in Italy, and it was a tactical target, I don't remember what it was exactly. Troop concentration or barracks. Anyway, we were flying toward the target, and there was some flack, but we weren't too frightened by German anti aircraft crews. They weren't too sharp. Very seldom would they come very close. But this day, I noticed, I looked up and I saw a bright red color. And then a few seconds later, a yellow color. And I said to the pilot, "Boy, isn't that pretty, "And he whapped me on the arm, "You dumb cadet, that's flack." They were shooting it up to keep the fighters from coming in so that they wouldn't be shooting down. So, that was memorable. That was probably one of my most viscous wounds, prides and black and blue arm when he hit me.

Crew Member: Hey, Rick?

Interviewer: Yeah?

Crew Member: Can you ask him, because you're the third interview today out of three men who flew and a pilot and a tail gunner, and they all talk about flack. Can you describe, you need to look at Rick as though he's asking you, what is the material of flack, how it works, and what is it like in a plane and you see it popping all around you?

Roy Stapp: Okay.

Crew Member: Can you look at Rick?

Roy Stapp: 88 millimeter, probably that big around. And the aircraft, anti aircraft teams would have, usually have three guns per team. And the missile, or the lead, or the missile, whatever was the name for it, was shot into the air. Actually, the people on the ground could set a timer in that piece of steel that's floating up into the air to explode. And when they do that, then all of this black smoke from the powder would come out and then thousands of little pieces of flack would fly every direction. In fact, all three of us, all three of we cadets, have a piece of flack that got embedded in our parachutes. That's sort of a really unusual, to have three have a piece of flack. And I got hit on this side, and the pressure of that flack just about through me up into the top of the cabin, but I had my seat belt on. But that really damaged nerves in my right side, and I limp around. In fact, right now, it's starting to ache from sitting there. But it did damage, somehow damaged the nerves. That was a frightening thing, to have that, as soon as the first one blew and you could see the black smoke, then you -- we'd put on flack suits that were over layers of steel down about to our knees and a flack helmet before we started over the target. And we much more feared the flack than we did the fighter aircraft.

Interviewer: It was like hot metal.

Roy Stapp: Yep.

Interviewer: That would just penetrate these aircraft.

Roy Stapp: Yep.

Elizabeth: Can you have him describe that?

Interviewer: Yeah -- go ahead and say that, just kind of like it was hot metal.

Roy Stapp: It was very hot, the explosion and the fact it went out the barrel of the guns made it hot, and then when it blew, it added more temperature to it. In fact, one day when I was flying with one of our buddies, a piece of a flack -- you wore flying boots, and it went down into his boots. And he said, "Take the airplane, take the airplane, I'm hit!" And he jumps around and pulls off his boot and turns it upside down and it was a hunk of flack that had hit something in here and had just dropped down into his boot. He didn't get the Purple Heart for that.

Crew Member: What does it sound like, when you are up there? Describe the sound to him.

Roy Stapp: A huge explosion, like dynamite within 50 feet, or you're blowing up a big tree, you have five or six sticks of dynamite, it's noisy.

Interviewer: Explain, if you can, how the Germans could make those things detonate at a specific elevation.

Roy Stapp: They just had a timing system on it, just like setting an alarm clock. They could dial that in very rapidly and then, of course, they had semblance of radar. They had an idea of it, but they had teams on those guns that were excellent. I mean, they -- we hadn't no one in Italy that even came close to being that well trained.

Interviewer: So, all they had to do was determine the elevation and they could shoot these up.

Roy Stapp: When they'd first fire, then they know what they set that particular missile, and then they would adjust from that to where it blew up, blew up low, then they would have it go a little bit higher. If it blew up -- and they would make those adjustments. And they were good.

Interviewer: And there's an unusual story about you going on a supposed milk run with two new crew members, or three. And tell us about that.

Roy Stapp: Well, that's when the war was almost to an end, and there were a few pockets on Siegfried Line that were still hostile. And, so, we were sent over to -- when we bombed, all six aircraft bombed off the lead aircraft. So, it was a pretty good coverage when it hit the ground. Well, we had this target over the Siegfried Line, and we had two new airplanes. They weren't in our aircraft, but they were in our element. And, uh, we dropped the bombs and the concussion from the bombs hitting down on the target came back up and it wrinkled the skin of the aircraft, and it sounded like a machine gun. And they had never had any combat at all, and I don't know, I think there were two -- I think they both bailed out and floated down and landed on a pill box. And the Germans put a Luger out and took them in. They came back to the base after the war, a little bit red-faced, but that was funny.

Interviewer: They were not in your airplane though?

Roy Stapp: No.

Crew Member: Can you have him say who they were though? He never did mention them. New cadets?

Roy Stapp: New pilots on all of these. We were all second lieutenants, you had to stay six months and be promoted if you did what you were supposed to.

Interviewer: He's talking about these airmen, these new guys that bailed out --

Roy Stapp: They were enlisted men, or probably sergeants.

Crew Member: We just need to have him say, "We had two new enlisted men who bailed out of a flight at day or something."

Roy Stapp: Yes.

Elizabeth: Can you say that you had two new enlisted men?

Roy Stapp: Yes, two new -- they were assigned into different duties. Engineering or sometimes they would be a repair on the 50 caliber guns, but they also had the duty on manning the 50 caliber machine guns, and they came in and were, you know, they'd take them out and let them do a little bit of shooting at some targets out over a lake, and then they'd put them on a mission. And I don't suppose that they explained to them that sometimes they get concussions that would come back up that would wrinkle. But that's what happened. Of course, they knew they couldn't have done that because the pilot has to tell them when to bail out or somebody, and on an intercom, which was a throat mic, we didn't have a push the button mic. We had to press these two little buttons against our neck to talk, and it wasn't a very good system. But that was our intercom and our radio.

Interviewer: There's an interesting story, happened about four weeks before the end of the war. Well, Roy, is there any other interesting things that happened to you on your missions that you'd like to relate?

Roy Stapp: Let's see. Oh, we had -- we were always having fun, and jokes. And we found an old German motorcycle somewhere, and somebody brought it back to the base and a couple of mechanics got it, and it was a direct drive. It didn't have a chain. So we were

bivouacked at an old chateau in France where the race track was. It was one of those moneyed Frenchman. But we got that motorcycle started up, and then were having a lot of fun with that. It finally faded out. But, uh, there was all kinds of, you know, all kinds of things that we could do. It kept us pretty busy. We flew -- we didn't have much rest between missions. The weather would keep us down sometimes. And we'd write letters at home. In fact, I wrote probably 200 letters home to parents and sister and family. And I'm right now trying to get them put together so that I can put them on a CD and let my children have them, if they want them. I don't know what else to do with them. But, we'd pick up a lot of fun things that happened to us as we went, as we went through the war together.

Interviewer: How did serving in World War II affect the rest of your life?

Roy Stapp: Drastically. I spent 41 years, one month and two days in the military. I loved the military. And I was fortunate enough to -- I wanted to stay in after the war ended. And I -- we didn't have very much time, because we had training time period and then maybe 300 or 400 hours combat time, which is not a great deal.

Interviewer: If you were to look at future generations, if you had a message that you'd like to give them, what would that be?

Roy Stapp: Well, the war now is so different. One airplane could do what a whole squadron in a B-26 could do. It's different in that way, but I think the love of country and the need for wanting to get the war over and everybody was eager to be part of it. I don't think that will ever happen again, as that did. I think the 9/11 thing brought people closer together, but nowhere near the atmosphere that was in World War II. They, you know, everybody worked hard and fought hard and, you know. Now days, it's just different. To be patriotic, as we were in World War II, I hope it happens, but I don't see it. And the military is a great way to be, I loved

the military. They made me get out. I didn't want to, but it was a public law that I was commissioned so many years and I had to be in a spot that was for a general, which I was, but it was soon filled by somebody else. But, I wished I could have stayed longer. We had a squadron at the Air National Guard because, it was the 130th, and I came and worked there full time as a technician, and the commander of the squadron was drowned and it left the position open as a commander, and I was a communications officer. And so, the general called me in and asked if I would be willing to take command of this 224-person squadron. And I did, it was a great awakening. I learned to love young people and be able to not judge them, but see who could do what. I could do that in a hurry. We had a squadron that first was aircraft control and we built the radar side up on Francis peak along with FAA. And we fed our information into Colorado Springs, and so we were on duty 24 hours a day with all these FAA radar on plotting boards. We did that for several years. Then we went to electronics installations, and would go all over the world on air bases and install radars and radios and telephone systems on their active duties. And I was fortunate enough to be commander for 22 years, which is probably a world record for a commander to stay in one squadron. But it was just a joy for me. We had a few goof offs, but the people that you get to know -- in fact, five of us get together, all in our 80s, that were in the same squadron in the same tent. And there was six of us, and two of us passed away. But we get together and reminisce and wonder why things are like they are and hope that we can do something to change it, but we're not sure.

Interviewer: Well, we really appreciate your service and appreciate you coming up here. Anything else? Any other questions from you guys?

Elizabeth: I'm curious; did you talk about the war when the war was over with your friends and family?

Interviewer: Talk to me.

Roy Stapp: No, I never had a problem about feeling anything about I wasn't going to come home, and well, I did talk about the Breisach raid, but anything that -- we were kept from really gory type stuff because if we got home, then we were behind the lines. We had two or three forced landings, and we had three or four aircraft that were blown out of the air, which is always sad. But none close to us as friends, and we talk about the fun times and the fact that we love the military and hope that we have a strong military. But I never, never thought that I wouldn't come home. And they said, "Well, did you believe in a god?" And of course, I'm a Christian and I believed in God, but when you're flying over a target, you're so busy; you may not get a prayer in. But I don't think there's any agnostic, any guy that doesn't believe in God that doesn't go over those -- in fact, I flew with a fellow that was ready to quit and he claimed that he did not believe in God, and maybe I was on my 10th or 15th mission, and we were having a pretty tough time and he was a little flack happy. But I happened to look over and he was saying something to somebody as we went over the target.

Crew Member: You were talking about the guy who was agnostic, but you heard him talking to somebody back there? Can you explain that -- say that story again to Rick.

Roy Stapp: As I had explained, I didn't know any of the pilots well enough to buddy with them. But this captain, he was a captain, and he'd had 35 or 40 missions, that's when they were letting them go home. But he was really nervous, and the fellows that had flown with him told me that he was agnostic and I, the next day, I was put with him. And that was his last mission that he flew and he went home. But there's no doubt in my mind, I was flying, and he was buckling up at flack, and I look over and he's talking to somebody up there, or where ever. And I know he was saying a prayer, and I was saying prayers, but, you know, you're so busy on

the Breisach raid, a radio came over my head and lit in my lap and the hot tubes, and I had to brush that off, you were busy. You had to watch the instruments and check on the crew, so it was a busy time. But, the agnostic was not agnostic, like fox hole. You don't have agnostics in fox holes.

Crew Member: Did you pray after, was it a sense when you a difficult mission, it was done and the plane was fine, did you just all go, "Ohh." Did you say something?

Roy Stapp: Individually, it is different individually.

Interviewer: Talk to me.

Roy Stapp: Okay, all right, Rick. Myself, I was brought up believing in God. I had not been a member of a church, I was Christian and I would often give a little prayer when we touched ground and thank the good Lord for us being able to do that. Others had church organizations, the Mormon Church and my two buddies were members and I was not. But, we never had anything like in a football game. Where you get together and pray. We would, as we sat looking at the picture shows looking at maps and getting an idea about targets, then we just talked to one another, look, "You're covering my butt, and I'm covering yours. Let's do it right." That type of thing. Well, I'm -- everyone in that tent was altogether different when it came to that. Most of that was silent, I never heard anyone pray out loud.

Interviewer: And every time you take off, your life's at risk.

Roy Stapp: Yeah, the second greatest thing is flying, and the first greatest thing is landing.

Interviewer: That would be.

Elizabeth: What makes a B-26 unique to other planes?

Roy Stapp: B-26 to other planes?

Elizabeth: From other planes, what is a B-26?

Roy Stapp: A B-26 is a medium bomber; a B-25 is a medium bomber. It's the aircraft, a B-25 is the aircraft that flew off the carrier and bombed Japan, Doolittle. A B-26 is a larger aircraft that just has a single vertical stabilizer; it's quite a bit larger. It has more horsepower and it carried a bigger load and it's a better aircraft. But there were only two medium bombers in the inventory, the B-25 and the B-26, and the 17s and the 24s, and they had many others in the fighters. But that, the group that bombed Japan was the 17th bomb group, which is the bomb group that we belonged to. Same group and it was the only bomb group established in World War I and had carried its name forward to World War II and it still exists somewhere. I think it was a little yellow badge that had seven German crosses on it, and I think in World War I, this bomb squadron, I guess they carry the explosive and throw it out from the back seat, but they said that they had seven missions, and if you see that show, it shows a pilot talking off and that little yellow badge or shield type thing is on the cover. Well then, when we went to Sardinia, the 17th bomb group had been sent to the ETO, European Theatre of Operation, and been given B-26s. It's a much more difficult aircraft to fly, certainly couldn't have taken off on an aircraft carrier, and they called it the Marauder. And they called it also The Flying Prostitute. And is this classified? Is this a PG rating?

Interviewer: Go ahead.

Roy Stapp: They called that aircraft The Flying Prostitute because when it came off the drawing board, they made a drastic mistake about the wing lift, and how the wings were put on. And they had to get larger engines to get more speed off the ground. So, they called it that because there was no visible means of support. And that was on the front page of the newsletter, the Army or military newsletter. I've got it at home.

Interviewer: And your missions on these two engine aircrafts didn't have the range as the B-17s, the B-24s. So, you were flying shorter missions in Italy and over Germany from France and so forth.

Roy Stapp: Yeah, four hours and 20 minutes was our maximum. The heavies, I feel bad for them. Yeah.

Interviewer: Tough.

Crew Member: So, did most young cadets in the Air Force want to be fighter pilots? Was that the dream job?

Roy Stapp: Oh, yeah.

Crew Member: Tell me why, because that's so dangerous. Why did they want the most dangerous job?

Roy Stapp: Well, the fighter pilot is alone. He doesn't have to be concerned about the crew, he can do great things. You know, if you're alert and know what you're doing, you can shoot down Germans and people. All the youngsters wanted to be fighter pilots and protect the bombers. I have a lot of friends that are fighter pilots, and I told them that we won the war. All they did was go up there and play around. But that was, that was the name of it. The Flying Prostitute, but it was an excellent two 2,000 horse power engines. And that's what made me blind in both ears.

Interviewer: The noise wasn't muffled, was it?

Roy Stapp: not at all, anybody had sense enough to muffle the noise.

Interviewer: And you didn't have any pressurization either.

Roy Stapp: No.

Interviewer: And you could fly lower levels, but you know, these 10,000 foot missions were very dangerous.

Roy Stapp: Oh, yeah. And very easy to aim at with anti aircraft. And when we had Northern Italy, the pass in Italy, Brenner. The Brenner Pass, we had targets of bridges across the Po River in that human deep canyon. And the peaks were over 10,000 feet. So the squadron had to fly up the river in order to get the bombardier, and of course they didn't have much resistance there. But they had a dive man standing on the side with BB guns. He could have hit us because sometimes the peaks were above the airplane. So, that was a little hairy. So just one of those things. I've got lots of wild stories to tell you. These are all true.

Crew Member: Did you guys party?

Roy Stapp: We had parties. Sometimes the guys in our tent, the three out of the six were drinkers, and two were smokers. The three cadets never fiddled with that. And they had wild parties and dances and we'd go into Paris and somebody would force us to go down to Pigal and watch the shows. But that was rest camp.

Interviewer: You was forced to do that, weren't you?

Roy Stapp: (Laughter).

Crew Member: What's "Pigal?"

Roy Stapp: Pigal is the area where nudity is all where ever you look on the shows. So, they had 10 or 15 different theatres that would put on different shows. And, I remember the first one, when we came back, they had us stay at Lord Haw-haw. Remember, he was a traitor. A British that came to the enemy and he'd built a big mansion, and we came there to wait so we could ship home. But, we took our buddies down to the show and they had really great things coming out of the wall, you know, stage production. And my little buddy got really

excited about this. The stair came down this way and it came down the side of the table, and he looked up and here was this girl in a G-string. And he yelled out loud, "She's naked!" So, everybody was watching him and not the girls.

Interviewer: This was before nudity was a big thing, but over in Paris, they had these semi-nude shows that were routine.

Roy Stapp: Yeah, and that's Pigal's, most of those were.

Interviewer: You remember the song, "How you going to keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paris?" That was why.

Roy Stapp: That's a good question.

Interviewer: Roy, thanks again for coming up.

Roy Stapp: Thank you, I'd like to see that.

Crew Member: That's you, right?

End of recording.